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H PASS TO SENATOR KERRY FROM AMBASSADOR LEBARON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [OREP](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SENATOR KERRY'S VISIT TO QATAR

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Mr. Chairman, Embassy Doha welcomes your visit to Qatar. We have requested host-country meetings for you with the Amir and Prime Minister on the margins of the U.S.-Islamic Forum. You would be the first Congressional visitor to meet in Doha with Qatari officials since Speaker Pelosi in May. We expect the primary focus of your discussions will be advancing U.S.-Qatar cooperation on Palestinian-Israeli issues. We begin there below, followed by a presentation of Qatar's regional views, diplomatic engagement, food security, and the role of Al Jazeera. At the end of this message, we provide an overview of the U.S.-Qatar relationship.

¶2. (C) In June, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Feltman proposed "continuous dialogue" with senior Qatari officials. Since that visit to Qatar, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Al-Mahmoud, MFA Assistant Minister Al-Rumaihi, and Prime Minister (also Foreign Minister) Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) have all traveled to Washington for consultations and dialogue. Both governments agree that we have generally "turned the corner" in our relationship, following a tense period during the second term of President George W. Bush.

¶3. (S) The souring of the relationship under the previous Administration stemmed largely from different approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the Amir, then-Secretary of State Rice sought his help in ensuring Hamas' participation in Palestinian elections, elections which the Amir said he told Rice from the beginning Hamas would win. In securing Hamas' participation, the Amir promised Qatar's financial support to the winner -- Hamas or Fatah. After Hamas' victory, the Bush Administration asked the Amir to cut off financial assistance to Hamas, a terrorist organization. Having given his word to Hamas that he would support them if they won, the Amir refused.

¶4. (C) Besides his abiding sense of commitment and loyalty, the Amir is someone who wants to take action. His frustration, if not his anger, with Arab inaction in helping the Palestinians led to Qatar's casting its lot with more radical elements just before President Obama took office. That was a lamentable departure from Qatar's normal behavior.

¶5. (C) The Amir has wealth and a vision to develop Qatar's potential in education, science, and technology. Neither his wealth nor his vision garners him respect. On the contrary, one of Qatar's problems is that its neighbors envy what this small state has at its disposal. The best way you can help us take advantage of Qatar's vision and resources is by tapping into the Amir's enthusiasm and energy and harnessing them as resources that we as partners can leverage together.

¶6. (C) GETTING THE MONEY: Qatar does not respond to our numerous appeals for financial assistance because they don't come from senior USG officials as part and parcel of a

bilateral strategic partnership. The Amir did not lead Qatar to where it is today without defining targets and creating stakeholders. He yearns to have the President reach to him (which began on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September) and chart a course together based on cooperation, commitment, and trust.

¶ 17. (C) Qatar has money, but it spends it wisely, on the whole. When Qatar assisted the victims of Hurricane Katrina, it partnered with Habitat for Humanity and other partners on the ground, endeavoring to make sure that every penny spent went to the victims and not administrative overhead. This is generally how Qatar approaches all foreign aid, and it's not unlike how most Americans make decisions regarding charitable giving.

¶ 18. (S) Speaker Pelosi in May was unable to persuade the Amir to support the Palestinian Authority financially. In his early January visit to Washington, HBJ made such a commitment, presumably understanding it is the price Qatar must pay for greater Qatari access in Washington. The money has not been delivered, and HBJ confided to the Ambassador after his Washington visit it would be useful if Secretary Clinton (invited to the U.S.-Islami Forum, but not attending) could make a pitch to the Amir to seal the deal.

¶ 19. (C) We encourage you to ask the Amir to aid financially the Palestinian Authority, understanding that the Amir will not cut off Hamas. The Amir's personal views aside Qataris across the board do not accept that Hamas is a terrorist organization, and they continue to provide financial support to it. The Amir believes that the Palestinian Authority (except for Abu Mazen and Fayyad) is corrupt. You should expect to hear the Amir complain about this, while nonetheless taking pride in Qatar's relationship with Abu Mazen, who was a student in Qatar years ago.

Qatar's Strategy of Balancing Competing Interests

¶ 10. (C) SAUDI ARABIA: The Amir's family, the Al Thanis, have ruled Qatar for more than 140 years. Given the small size of Qatar and a desire to stay in power, the Al Thani family does its best to stay on good terms with larger regional players such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. The relationship with Riyadh had been strained following perceptions in the Kingdom that Al Jazeera's coverage of the Saudi royal family was unflattering, leading the Saudis a few years ago to pull their ambassador. However, a Saudi ambassador returned to Doha about two years ago, and relations are generally improving after Qatar toned down criticism of the Saudi royal family on Al Jazeera.

¶ 11. (S) IRAN: The Qataris deeply distrust Iran and oppose that neighbor's nuclear weapons program. But sharing the third largest natural gas reserves in the world with Iran obliges the Qatari leadership to maintain a "working relationship" with Tehran. As an example of the balancing act Qatar plays with Iran -- and elsewhere -- Qatar will not close the one Iranian bank serving Qatar, as the Bush Administration asked. Nor, however, will Qatar allow Iran to open additional banks, as we expect the Iranians would like. Instead, in classic Qatari fashion, the government announced it had granted permission to the sole operating Iranian bank to open a second branch -- on the same day former Treasury Secretary Paulson visited Doha in June 2008. Such behavior does not satisfy either the U.S. or Iran, but it exemplifies how the Al Thani leadership tries to maintain balance between competing interests. (Think also of Qatar's relations with Iran juxtaposed to the considerable U.S. military presence in Qatar.) Since the 2009 Iranian presidential elections that resulted in protests, Qatar has stepped up visits by its senior officials to Tehran. We assess Qatar's willingness to fulfill Iran's need for political engagement when others increasingly shun it as a reflection of Doha's desire to keep Tehran at bay and the natural gas flowing.

¶12. (S) RELATIONS WITH BAD ACTORS: Qatar's contacts with Hamas are consistent with the Amir's stated desire to have good relations with everyone. The Qatari leadership also appears to calculate that maintaining relations with bad actors such as Hezbollah and the Iranians helps ensure Qatar's security by serving as an insurance policy against attack -- a real concern given Qatar's hosting of U.S. military personnel and the perception of this by extremist elements in the region.

¶13. (S) RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL: Up until January 2009, Israel maintained a quasi-diplomatic presence in Doha. Qatar's "freezing" of Israel's Trade Office presence occurred in the wake of the failure by Qatar to achieve a quorum of Arab leaders for an Arab League Summit aimed at addressing the crisis in Gaza. The subsequent Doha Summit on Gaza, attended by a large Arab and Palestinian contingent from the rejectionist camp, voted to break off ties with Israel as a protest over Gaza. Qatar acted immediately; Mauritania later. Having jettisoned their own policy of maintaining overt good relations with Israel, however, the Qataris are hoping for a gesture by the Israelis vis-a-vis the Palestinians that would allow Qatar to reverse itself with dignity and allow Israeli diplomats to return, according to HBJ.

The Trend for Increased Diplomatic Activism by Qatar

¶14. (SBU) SUDAN: Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Al-Mahmoud, has played a central role in the Darfur peace process, alongside UN/African Union mediator Djibril Bassole. Richard Williamson, special envoy for Sudan under the previous Administration, and current Special Envoy Scott Gration have both supported and encouraged Qatar's efforts.

¶15. (SBU) Al-Mahmoud and Bassole were able to convince the Government of Sudan (GOS) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the strongest of the Darfuri armed movements, to sign a Goodwill Agreement in February 2009, even though talks collapsed in May over prisoner swaps and humanitarian access.

¶16. (SBU) Momentum for Doha resumed in November, when Bassole's Joint Mediation and Support Team (JMST) organized a series of meetings in Doha between the parties and Darfuri civil society. The armed movements, however, criticized the civil society process and claimed that the participants were hand-picked by the GOS. The consultations Bassole and Al-Mahmoud planned to hold between civil society and the parties in Doha have yet to take place.

¶17. (SBU) Bassole and Al-Mahmoud continue to hold periodic consultations between the armed movements and the GOS in Doha, although the prospects for success in this next round of talks are slim. The GOS has warned that this will be the last round of negotiations it participates in and, deal or no deal, it will walk away in mid-March to concentrate on campaigning for the April elections.

¶18. (SBU) JEM, citing its superior offensive capabilities, continues to complain that it should be the only armed movement at the table. Abdel Wahid, the Paris-based leader of the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA), refuses to join the talks and continues to orchestrate attacks in the field on pro-Doha SLA factions. The SLA groups that have assembled in Doha, with the help of the Special Envoy Gration and Libya, remain unwilling to enter direct negotiations until their movements formally unify the field. All the while, Bassole has privately hinted to the international community that he plans to resign in the next few months and no successor is yet in view.

¶19. (C) LESSONS FROM LEBANON: Qatar's humanitarian-based initiative in Sudan came after its Amir and Prime Minister successfully mediated the Lebanese conflict in June 2008, to

much acclaim in many parts of the region. In doing so, the Qatari leadership reaffirmed its belief that Qatar's policy of having open doors across the ideological spectrum was important to promoting regional stability.

¶20. (C) MEDIATION, NOT MILITARY MIGHT: Considering Qatar's wealth, its growing confidence in mediating disputes, and the prestige that such involvement brings, we expect Qatar will continue to carve out a regional diplomatic role for itself in the coming years. A few of Qatar's initiatives have foundered, including an effort (begun long before the recent troubles) to mediate a cease-fire between the Yemeni government and the Shi'a Houthi rebels in the north. Ethiopia also broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar when it tried to mediate disputes between it and neighboring Eritrea.

¶21. (C) Qatar, with a population of fewer than 250,000 citizens, will never be a military power. Having its sights set on regional diplomacy and mediation is quite realistic, however. What resources Qatar is putting into its military are aimed at providing airlift capacity for humanitarian interventions. Qatar has taken possession of U.S.-supplied C-17 aircraft, and Qatar most recently used a C-17 to deliver humanitarian assistance to Haiti.

FOOD SECURITY

¶22. (SBU) In Embassy Doha's judgment, Qatar's food security policies and strategies reflect the rapidly growing intent by the Amir and Crown Prince to make food security a key national priority for Qatar, not just in terms of Qatar's own food security needs, but in terms of the food security needs of the Arab region. (HBJ supports having an active food security policy, as long as it has a strong commercial focus.)

¶23. (SBU) That judgment stems from our conversations with Qatari government officials:

-- While Qatar's National Food Security Program's (QNFSP) short-term focus is on the State of Qatar and building the domestic agricultural sector to diminish reliance on imports, the strategic goal of QNFSP is to export the technologies developed in Qatar to countries throughout the MENA region, and other areas with arid climates.

-- Toward that end, some research results will be part of the public domain and available to everyone. Some technology transfer to poorer MENA nations will be donor-based, through the activities of the offices of the State Minister for International Cooperation. The third component of Qatar's strategic goal of exporting QNFSP technology will be more commercially based, and will employ public/private partnerships.

AL JAZEERA

¶24. (S) HBJ offered during his visit to Washington in January to send members of Al Jazeera's board of directors and management to Washington to engage with U.S. officials on Al Jazeera's coverage. There are ample precedents for a bilateral dialogue on Al Jazeera as part of improving bilateral relations. We addressed the case of Saudi Arabia earlier, but Tunisia and Jordan have also benefited from such a dialogue in recent months.

The U.S.-Qatar Relationship

¶25. (S) The breadth and depth of Qatar's relationship with the U.S. is impressive, especially for a country the size of Connecticut, with about two million inhabitants, of whom only

about 225,000 are actually Qatari citizens.

-- Because it is so small and its energy resources so large, Qatar now has an annual per capita income of over 60,000 USD (the highest in the world).

-- Wealth has bolstered the country's political ambitions, leading to Qatari foreign policy initiatives that too often have been at odds with U.S. objectives. Examples include Qatar's relations with Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria.

-- Until recently, Qatar was not fully cooperative in intelligence sharing and combating terrorism financing, which also led to tensions with Washington.

-- The U.S.-Qatari military relationship is solid. Qatar provides the U.S. military exceptional access to two major Qatari military installations, Al Udaid Air Base and Camp As-Saliyah -- two of CENTCOM's most important installations. Qatar charges us no rent, and in fact is funding over 700 million USD in construction projects for the exclusive use of the U.S. military.

-- The U.S.-Qatar economic relationship is vital. U.S. energy companies have invested tens of billions of dollars in the oil and gas industry here. Qatar, which holds the third largest natural gas reserves in the world after Iran and Russia, is expected to become later this year one of the most important suppliers of imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the U.S. market.

-- Our educational and cultural relationship with Qatar is strong and growing. Qatar has committed itself like few other Arab states to modernizing its educational system, and has turned decisively to the United States for help. Qatar has imported branch campuses of six U.S. universities, including Texas A&M, Carnegie-Mellon, Weill-Cornell Medical School, Georgetown, Virginia Commonwealth, and Northwestern. At the elementary and secondary levels it is instituting a U.S. model of charter schools.

-- Al Jazeera, the television network with an Arabic-speaking audience of some 60 million, is based in Qatar and funded by the State of Qatar. The network's coverage, particularly by its Arabic service (there is also an English service, a children's channel, a public affairs channel and a number of sports channels) on issues important to the U.S., has long been an irritant in our bilateral relationship. We nevertheless recognize the value of USG officials appearing on Al Jazeera in order to ensure that officials appearing on Al Jazeera are heard in the Arab world. Because it is funded by the State of Qatar, Al Jazeera avoids critical reports on Qatar. In any event, its Arabic service remains an important source of outreach to Arabic speakers around the world, especially on Israel and Palestinian issues. We are happy to arrange an interview on Al Jazeera for you if you have interest and your time on the ground in Doha permits.

Lebaron